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OUTLOOK NOTES

THE cause of elective studies in the high school and academy makes steady, if somewhat erratic, progress. It has had the checkered history of most innovations. A distinguished Englishman once volunteered to eat the boiler of the first steamship that should cross the Atlantic. But the steamship crossed the Atlantic nevertheless, the progress of civilization being somewhat disregarding of the effects of an overdose of iron on the stomach even of a British lord. When it was first hinted that it might be well to extend the elective system from the colleges to the secondary schools, some of us, the writer to his sorrowful recollection, protested that such a step would bring ruin and devastation upon the fair structure we were laboring to perfect. After all, there was some reason in the protest; the system, as working then in the colleges, was no system at all. It lacked the elements of freedom, and just missed the delights of anarchy. The colleges have learned a good deal about elective courses in a dozen years; among other things they have learned to call them "elective" instead of "optional." They have learned, too, that freedom brings responsibility, not only to the student, but, in far greater degree, to the faculty also. To let a class of immature youths loose in the pastures of knowledge, imperfect instinct their only guide, was as apt as not to turn the promised feast into a mess of pottage. The college professor had to develop a new function—that of educational adviser. Incidentally he developed into a new type of professor. Most

**ELECTIVES IN
THE SECONDARY
SCHOOL**

college graduates in middle life are unable to call from the storehouse of memory any instance in which a professor discussed with them the studies they ought to pursue and the mutual interests and relations of those studies. The atmosphere pervading the relations of faculty and students was then the atmosphere of the police court. Nowadays it may be that the undergraduate gets, from his own point of view, not only all the advice he needs, but perhaps a little over for good measure. Advice, like all good things, may be superabundant, but indigestion is better than death from starvation. The whole system of deans, those officers whose main function is the regulation of students in the choice and prosecution of their studies, is the growth of recent years. There is not a reputable college in the country in which the administrative work has not increased at least fourfold in the past ten years. This change and other changes mainly result, directly or indirectly, from the spread of the elective principle.

So far as the administration of electives goes, the secondary schools have yet much to learn from this history of the colleges. Either the elective system takes a vast deal of the time of the principal and his assistants or it is a positive evil. Nothing is simpler than to run pupils through a prescribed curriculum; few things make larger demands upon knowledge of adolescent nature, general familiarity with the whole field of instruction, tact and sympathy, than the direction of a large number of individual students through a considerable field of elective studies, so that each student may, so far as is humanly possible, get out of the school its very best. Among other things, almost limitless time and patience on the part of the adviser are essentials. In other words, the elective system in secondary schools makes vastly greater demands upon the administrative officers, if it is to be a success, than did and does the uniform prescribed curriculum. For those who are willing to meet these demands there are rewards of the highest and most satisfying kind. But the person who might make a very good principal under the old plan is not always the person to reach the highest success under the new.

THERE is now developing and there will continue to develop a new type of secondary-school principal. In some of the larger schools the college plan has already been adopted; there is a dean who attends to the students, advises them as to their studies, and sometimes admonishes them as to their sins, while the principal, not always so called, attends to the teachers, the arrangement of courses, and the administrative work lying outside the school. Not in many schools is this division of labor as yet possible. Until it is, and where, because the school is too small, it never can be, new and larger demands are made upon the principal. In many and probably most cases these demands are cheerfully, successfully, and almost unconsciously met. Yet principals have felt that their work was growing heavier, and necessary relief has not always been forthcoming. The principal used to teach almost as many classes as the other teachers; sometimes more, as he had to take all that were left over. His administrative work was very unexact, matters of discipline mainly and the signing of reports. Very little time, indeed, was taken up in interviews with pupils, less still in interviews with parents. With an elective system of studies, and with the growing necessity for good understanding between parents and schools, personal relations with parents and pupils make, and ought to make, large inroads upon a principal's time. This fact should be recognized by school boards. The more a principal is required to teach beyond a reasonable limit, the less possibility is there for him to meet his highest opportunities. It is a misfortune when the school is so large that the principal cannot teach at all, for the contact that the class room gives is a source of joy and revelation to the teacher-principal, without which he is in danger. The relations of teachers to pupils have in the past been closer in the secondary schools than in the higher institutions. To this intimacy, and to the fact that secondary schools have youth in the earlier and more impressionable period of adolescence, is due the great influence secondary education has had in molding men and women. The elective system, rightly managed, offers yet larger opportunities in this direction. Upon the principal

**THE NEW
PRINCIPAL**

mainly devolve the responsibilities; to the principal come the largest opportunities in this work. School boards and superintendents need to get as principals persons who are eager for these responsibilities and opportunities—few principals now in office are not—and then see to it that they have a fair chance.

C. H. THURBER